



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

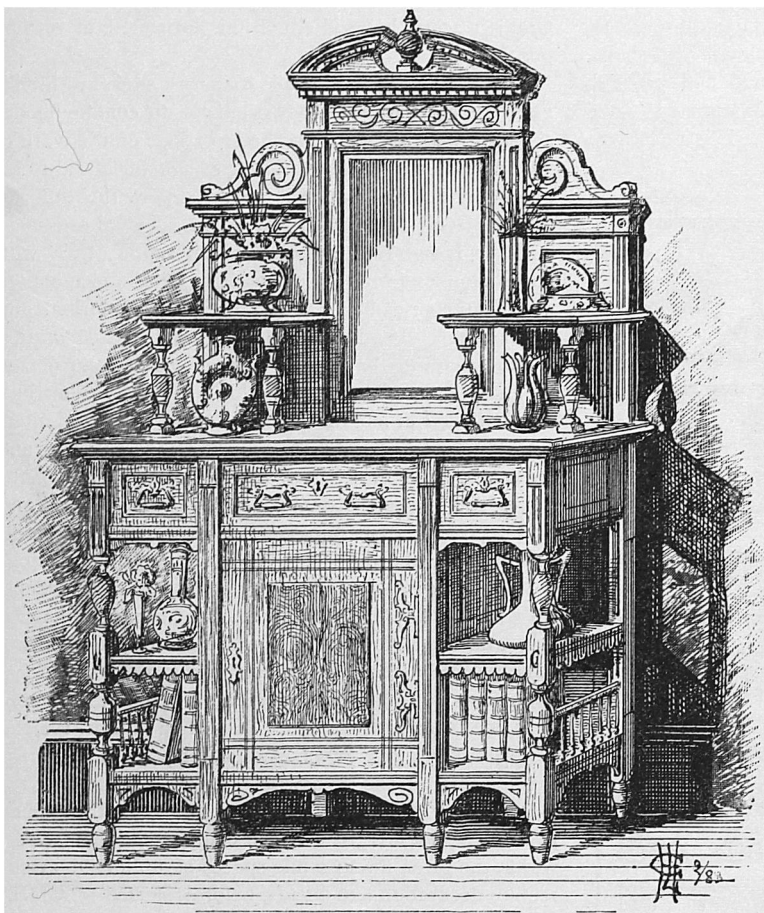
This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



SIDEBOARD. DESIGNED BY G. L. HEPINEUZE.

## CONVENTIONALIZING PLANT FORMS.

IN the course of a most interesting lecture, before the London Society of Arts, on the Principles and Practice of Ornamental Design, Lewis Forman Day said:

"The degree and kind of modification necessary to the adaptation of natural forms to the purpose of ornament cannot be arbitrarily described; it will depend entirely upon the conditions of the case. The natural element may be almost eliminated in the process of adaptation, or it may remain paramount. The degree of modification needed, or the degree of naturalness admissible, will depend not only upon the aim of the artist, but also upon the arbitrariness or naturalness of the composition. A strictly formal arrangement involves an equally formal kind of foliation, while natural leaves and flowers call for proportionately natural growth in the design. If, for example, it were a question of clothing a geometric skeleton with foliage, the form of the skeleton would determine the formality of the leaves. If, on the other hand, some natural form of leaf or flower were peremptory, it would logically determine the lines of the design. Rendering and arrangement should, that is to say, naturally be in keeping. But this simple principle is far from being sufficiently borne in mind. One often sees a kind of cast iron flower, reminding one of a preternaturally prim rosette, or of a catherine-wheel perhaps, with firework foliage, together with stems and stalks that have some pretensions to growth. Or you may see leaves and flowers altogether as natural as can be springing mechanically from quite arbitrary lines.

"The Japanese, who render the forms of leaves almost naturally, make them grow from the stalk; the Greeks, at their best, made leaves and their attachments alike more formal; while the Mohammedan rendering of leafage is so remotely related to nature that one scarcely resents the deliberate way in which the principle of growth is disregarded.

"Yet it is hard to reconcile one's self to the absence of something like growth, even in the most arbitrary forms of ornament. It is interesting always to be reminded of nature: and I think that the ornamentist who has any love for nature, or any knowledge of it, will, as a matter of course, make his ornament grow. Moreover, he will make it conform at least so far with nature, that, at all events, it shall never present the appearance of an agglomeration of ill-assorted natural details. Certain features in his design may, for example, recall familiar leaves and flowers and fruits, and so on. But he will not associate single flowers with fruits that grow in

clusters, catkin blossoms with seeds in pods, woody leaves with tender twining stalks, nor tendrils with the growth of a forest tree. According to his acquaintance with nature, he will abstain, instinctively, from all such incongruities. I know that the artists of the later Renaissance made all manner of flowers and fruit grow inconsequently from a single stalk; but I am not prepared to accept the artists of the later Renaissance (for all the masterly ability of some of them) as safe guides in the matter of taste; nor, indeed, to accept any precedent that cannot justify its claims to our respect. Let every precedent be stripped of its prestige, and as strictly looked over as the newest of recruits, and let the rickety ones be dismissed with thanks. The accepted precedents are not all sound.

"I should say, for instance, that though there is much to be learned from the Gothic rendering of flower forms and foliage, it by no means solves for us the whole problem of conventional treatment. The vine was treated in the middle ages with a simplicity and breadth worthy of all respect, but without great appreciation of the characteristic vine forms. The inevitable regu-

larity of the 'ecclesiastical' grape clusters becomes eventually wearisome, and the accompanying tendrils have seldom any very close relation to the forms of nature, which, nevertheless, are admirably ornamental in their growth.

"The Tudor rendering of the rose is in many respects masterly. I doubt if it can well be improved upon. But the seed-vessels of the plant have been turned to surprisingly little account in design; and so have the thorns, again, though they invite an ornamental treatment, which, so far as I know, has not been attempted.

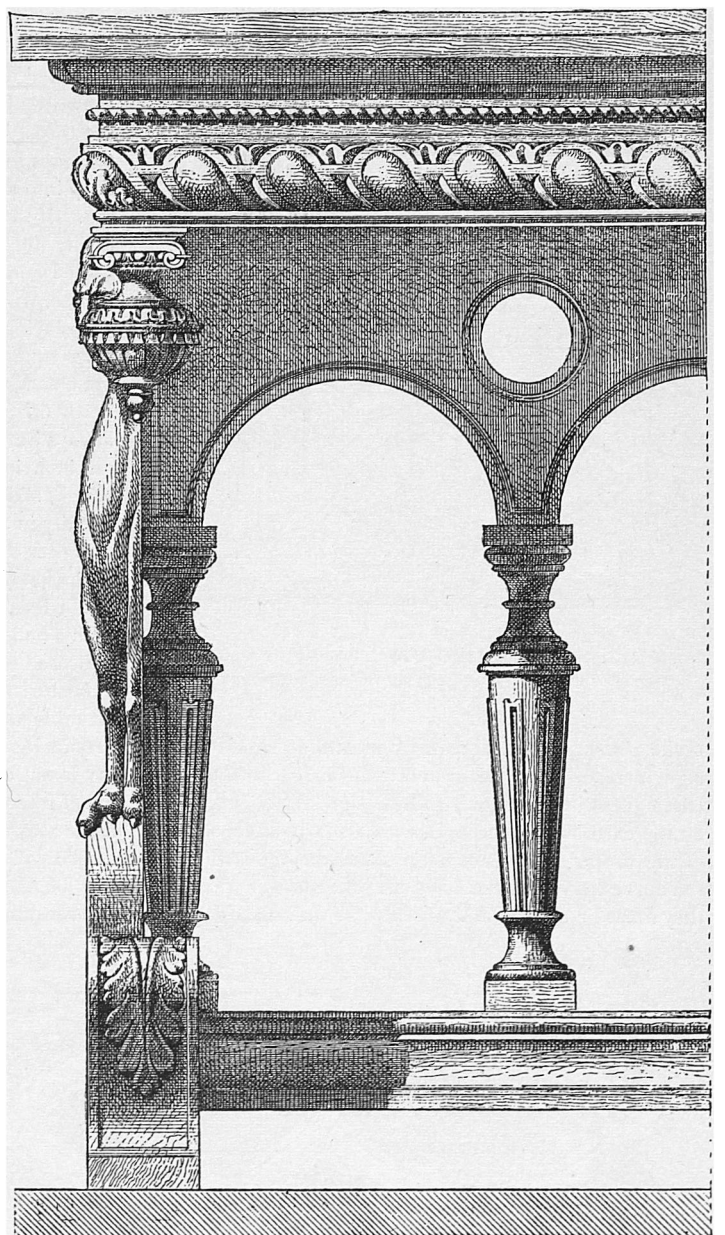
"The Gothic lily is represented not unfrequently with five petals, so little is it studied from nature, and there is seldom much recognition in mediæval work of that peculiar wiry twist of the leaf which is so characteristic of the plant. The symbolic passion-flower, again, is always rather tame; its tendrils are only remotely like nature; and the broad, distinctive stipules of the leaves, decorative though they be, are turned to no account.

"Apropos of the passion-flower, it should be observed that obviously elegant and graceful forms of growth, such as the passion-flower, the convolvulus, the fuchsia, the birch tree and so on, do not, as a matter of course, lend themselves most kindly to ornamental treatment. Sometimes it seems as though the contrary were the case, just as it is not exactly in romantic or what is called picturesque scenery that the landscape painter finds the best subjects for pictures.

"The Japanese treatment of plant form is always more characteristic. The artist evidently goes straight to nature for his inspiration, and though he indulges sometimes in angular and ugly forms, there is always a decorative as well as a natural quality in his design. He knows, indeed, how in season to compel all natural forms whatsoever to submit to decorative needs. He can be on occasion most uncompromising in the way he will sacrifice nature to his

purpose, but it is obvious that it is not from ignorance or incapacity that he makes the sacrifice. The conventionality of his treatment is the outcome and evidence of the supremacy of the decorative instinct in him."

IN some sensible editorials, The New York Times recently called attention to the propriety of using the flat roofs of our city houses during the summer for the purpose of taking the air. Two years ago, in giving some suggestions on the fitting up of an Oriental room, we advocated the conversion of the roof over the extension now so common in the rear of our city dwellings into a lounging or sitting-room which should be half a tent, half of very light architecture, and which could be thrown open to the air much or little as might be desired. There is one strong objection to the use of the ordinary house roof for such purposes at present. The escape pipes for sewer gas are seldom carried more than a foot or two higher than the roof, and make it, in fact, the most unhealthy part of the house. This might easily be obviated if everybody on a block would agree to carry those pipes some ten or twelve feet higher; but some would doubtless refuse, and no one would be safe unless all should agree. The Times' proposals also contemplated the strengthening of the roof so that it might bear the weight of beds of earth for flowers and plants, the raising of the house walls four or five feet all around for a parapet, and the providing of a convenient mode of approach instead of the usual narrow stairs in a dark closet, ending at a heavy trap-door. All this would entail considerable expense, and without awnings it would be useless during the heated part of the day; while the awnings, again, would require firm supports and an easy means of raising and lowering them. There is no doubt, however, neither that the thing is feasible nor that it would be worth whatever it might cost. But most of the advantages expected of it may be secured by the plan which we have recommended, and which, as to details, might easily be modified so as to meet all requirements.



DETAIL OF OLD CARVED TABLE SHOWN ON OPPOSITE PAGE.